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PRAYER AND INCANTATION

Although in everyday language the word "prayer" is most often heard in a very vague sense, and is even taken as a synonym for the term "oration" in its generality, we believe it is appropriate to retain or restore to it the much more specific and restricted meaning it derives from its very etymology, for "prayer" properly and exclusively means "request" and cannot, without misuse, be employed to designate anything else[1]. From this perspective, a very clear distinction must be established between prayer and what we will call "incantation," using this term for lack of a more precise one, which is lacking in Western languages, and reserving the right to define it precisely later.

First, to indicate how prayer can be understood, let us consider any community, whether religious or simply social: each member of this community is bound to it to a certain extent, determined by the scope of the community's sphere of action, and, to that same extent, they must logically participate in return in certain benefits, entirely material in some cases (such as that of present-day nations, for example, or the many kinds of associations based on a pure and simple solidarity of interests), but which can also, in other cases, relate to extra-corporeal modalities of the individual, that is to say to what can be called in a general way the psychic domain (consolations or other favors of a sentimental order, and sometimes even of a higher order), or, while being material, be obtained by means that appear immaterial, let us say more precisely by the intervention of elements not belonging to the bodily order, but nevertheless acting directly on it (the obtaining of a cure by prayer is a particularly clear example of this last case). In all this, we are speaking only of the individual's modalities, for these advantages can never extend beyond the individual domain, the only one that communities, whatever their nature, actually reach, provided

1 See F. Schuon's article, De l'Oraison, in the March 1935 issue.

they are not initiatory organizations (these being, as we have explained previously in other articles, the only ones whose express purpose is to go beyond this domain), and which concern themselves with contingencies and special applications of practical interest from some point of view, and not merely, of course, in the crudest "utilitarian" sense.

We can therefore consider each community as possessing, in addition to purely material means of action in the ordinary sense of the word, that is to say, pertaining solely to the physical order, a subtle force of order constituted in some way by the contributions of all its past and present members, and which, consequently, is all the more considerable and capable of producing more intense effects the older the community is and the greater its membership. It is also evident that this quantitative consideration essentially implies that it concerns the individual domain, beyond which it can no longer intervene in any way. Each member will be able, when needed, to use a portion of this force to their own advantage, and it will suffice for them to harmonize their individuality with the whole of the community to which they belong, a result they will obtain by conforming to the rules established by the community and appropriate to the various circumstances that may arise; thus, if the individual then formulates a request, it is, in short, at least in the most immediate way, to what one might call the spirit of the community (although the word "spirit" is somewhat inappropriate, since, fundamentally, it is only a psychic entity that is being discussed) that they will, consciously or unconsciously, address this request. However, it should be added that not everything is reducible to this in all cases: in the case of communities attached to an authentic and regular traditional form, which is notably the case of religious communities, and where the observance of the rules we have just discussed consists more specifically in the performance of certain rites, there is also the intervention of a truly "non-human" element, that is to say, what we have properly called a "spiritual influence,"* but which must also be regarded here as descending into the individual sphere, and as exerting its action there by means of the collective force in which it finds its support[2].

2 One can note that, according to Christian doctrine, the role of "spiritual influence" corresponds to the

Sometimes, the force we have just discussed, or, more precisely, the synthesis of "spiritual influence" with the collective force into which it is, so to speak, "incorporated," can concentrate on a physical "support," such as a specific place or object, which acts as a veritable "condenser," and produce perceptible manifestations there, like those reported in the Hebrew Bible concerning the Ark of the Covenant and the Temple of Solomon; one could also cite here, to varying degrees, pilgrimage sites, tombs, and relics of saints or other figures venerated by adherents of such and such a traditional form. This is the principal cause of the "miracles" that occur in the various religions, for these are facts whose existence is undeniable; it goes without saying, moreover, that, despite the common perception, these facts should not be considered contrary to natural laws, any more than, from another point of view, the "supra-rational" should be mistaken for the "irrational." In reality, "spiritual influences" also have their laws, which, although of a different order than those of natural forces (both psychic and corporeal), are not without certain analogies with them; thus, it is possible to determine circumstances particularly favorable to their action, which those who are their dispensers by virtue of the functions invested in them within a traditional organization can thereby bring about and direct, if they possess the necessary knowledge. It is important to note that the "miracles" in question here are, in themselves and independently of their cause, which alone possesses a "transcendent" character, purely physical phenomena, perceptible by one or more of the five external senses. Such phenomena are, moreover, the only ones that can be observed generally and indiscriminately by the entire mass of the people or "believers," whose effective understanding does not extend beyond the limits of the bodily modality of individuality.

The benefits that can be obtained through prayer and the practice of the rites of a social or religious community (rites common to all its members without exception, therefore purely exoteric and having no initiatory character, and insofar as they are not considered to serve as a basis for spiritual "realization") are essentially relative and contingent,

action of "grace" and that of the collective force of the "communion of saints".

but are nevertheless by no means negligible for the individual, who is himself relative and contingent. He would therefore be wrong to deprive himself of them voluntarily, if he is attached to some organization capable of providing them to him. Thus, since it is necessary to take into account the nature of the human being as it is, in the order of reality to which it belongs, it is by no means blameworthy, even for someone who is something other than a simple "believer" (making here a distinction between "belief" and "knowledge" which corresponds in short to that of exotericism and esotericism), to conform, for an interested purpose, by the very fact that it is individual, and outside of any properly doctrinal consideration, to the external prescriptions of a religion or traditional legislation, provided that he attributes to what he expects from it only its proper importance and the place that legitimately belongs to it, and provided also that the community does not put conditions on it which, although commonly admissible, would constitute a real impossibility in fact in this particular case; Subject to these reservations alone, prayer, whether addressed to a collective entity or, through it, to the "spiritual influence" that acts through it, is perfectly legitimate, even according to the most rigorous orthodoxy in the realm of pure doctrine.

These considerations will make it easier to understand, through the comparison they allow us to draw, what we will now say about incantation; it is essential to note that what we call incantation has absolutely nothing in common with the magical practices sometimes given the same name; but moreover, we have explained ourselves sufficiently on the subject of magic on numerous occasions so that no confusion is possible and it is unnecessary to dwell on it further. The incantation we are discussing, unlike prayer, is not a request, and it does not even presuppose the existence of anything external (which every request necessarily presupposes), because externality can ultimately only be understood in relation to the individual, whom it is precisely a matter of transcending; it is an aspiration of the being towards the Universal, in order to obtain what we might call, in somewhat "theological" language, a spiritual grace, that is to say, essentially, an inner illumination which, naturally, may be more or less complete depending on the circumstances. Here, the action of

“spiritual influence” must be considered in its pure state, so to speak; the individual, instead of seeking to draw it down upon themselves as in prayer, tends instead to rise up towards it. This incantation, which is thus defined as an entirely internal operation in principle, can nevertheless, in many cases, be expressed and “supported” externally by words or gestures, constituting certain initiatory rites, such as the munira in the Hindu tradition or the dhikr in the Islamic tradition, and which must be considered as determining rhythmic vibrations that have a repercussion across a more or less extensive domain in the indefinite series of states of being. Whether the result actually obtained is more or less complete, as we said earlier, the ultimate goal to be achieved is always the realization within oneself of the “Universal Man,” through the perfect communion of all states, harmoniously and in accordance with the hierarchy, in full blossoming in both senses of “amplitude” and “exaltation,” that is to say, both in the horizontal expansion of the modalities of each state and in the vertical superposition of the different states, according to the geometric figuration that we have explained in detail in The Symbolism of the Cross.

This leads us to establish another distinction, considering the various degrees that can be attained according to the extent of the result obtained in striving toward this goal; And first of all, at the bottom and outside the hierarchy thus established, we must place the multitude of the “profane,” that is to say, all those who, like the simple believers of religions, can only obtain actual results in relation to their bodily individuality, and within the limits of this portion or special modality of individuality, since their consciousness goes neither further nor higher than the domain enclosed within these restricted limits. Yet, among these believers, there are a few, in small numbers, who acquire something more (and this is the case of certain mystics, who could be considered in this sense as more “intellectual” than others): without leaving their individuality, but in “extensions” of it, they indirectly perceive certain realities of a higher order, not as they are in themselves, but translated symbolically and clothed in psychic or mental forms. These are still phenomena (that is to say, in the etymological sense, appearances, always relative and illusory insofar as they are formal),

but suprasensible phenomena, which are not observable by everyone, and which can bring to those who perceive them certainties, always incomplete, fragmentary, and scattered, but nevertheless superior to the pure and simple belief they replace; this result is obtained passively, that is to say, without intervention of the will, and by the ordinary means indicated by religions, in particular by prayer and the performance of prescribed works, for all this does not yet leave the realm of the ectosteric.

At a much higher degree, and even already profoundly separate from this one, are those who, having extended their consciousness to the extreme limits of integral individuality, manage to perceive directly the higher states of their being, but without, however, actually participating in them; Here, we are in the realm of initiation, but this initiation, real in terms of the extension of individuality into its extracorporeal modalities, is still only theoretical and virtual in relation to higher states, since it does not currently lead to their possession. It produces incomparably more complete, more developed, and more coherent certainties than in the previous case, because it no longer belongs to the phenomenal realm; yet, the one who acquires them can be compared to a man who only knows light through the rays that reach him (in the previous case, he knew it only through reflections, or shadows projected into the field of his restricted individual consciousness like the prisoners in Plato's symbolic cave), whereas, to know light perfectly in its intimate and essential reality, one must go back to its source and identify with that very source. This latter case corresponds to the fullness of real and effective initiation, that is, to the conscious and voluntary taking possession of the totality of states of being, according to the two senses we have indicated; this is the complete and final result of the incantation, quite different, as we see, from all those that mystics can attain through prayer, for it is nothing other than the very perfection of metaphysical knowledge; The Yogi of the Hindu tradition, or the Çûft of the Islamic tradition, if we understand these terms in their strict and true sense, is the one who has reached this supreme degree, and who has thus realized in his being the total possibility of the "Universal Man".)

THE LAND OF THE SUN

Among the localities, often difficult to identify, that play a role in the legend of the Holy Grail, some attach particular importance to Glastonbury, which is said to be the place where Joseph of Arimathea settled after his arrival in Great Britain, and where many other things have been attributed, as we shall see later. Undoubtedly, some of these interpretations are more or less questionable, and some seem to involve genuine confusion; but it is possible, however, that these very confusions may have some reasons that are not without interest from the point of view of "sacred geography" and the successive locations of certain traditional centers. This is what the singular discoveries presented in a recently published anonymous work[1] would seem to indicate. Certain points in this work might warrant some reservations, for example, regarding the interpretation of place names whose origin is more likely quite recent, but the essential part, along with the supporting maps, could hardly be considered purely fanciful. Glastonbury and the surrounding Somerset region would have constituted, in a very remote and perhaps "prehistoric" era, an immense "stellar temple," defined by the tracing on the ground of gigantic effigies representing the constellations, arranged in a circular figure that is like an image of the celestial vault projected onto the surface of the earth. This would represent a body of work reminiscent, in essence, of that of the ancient mound-builders of North America; the natural arrangement of the rivers and hills could, moreover, have suggested this layout, which would indicate that the location was not chosen arbitrarily, but rather by virtue of a certain "predetermination"; it is nonetheless true that, to complete and perfect the design, what the author calls "an art founded on the principles of Geometry" was required[2]. If these figures have been preserved in such a way as to still be recognizable today, it is supposedly because the monks of Glastonbury, until the time of the Reformation, carefully maintained them, which implies that they must

1 A Guide to Glastonbury's Temple at the Stars, its giant effigies described from air views. maps, and from The High History of the Holy Graal. (John M. Watkins, London).

2 This expression is clearly intended to suggest that the tradition to which this art belonged continued in what subsequently became the Masonic tradition.

have retained knowledge of the tradition inherited from their distant predecessors, the Druids, and undoubtedly others before them, for, if the deductions drawn from the position of the constellations represented are correct, the origin of these figures would date back to nearly three thousand years before the Christian era[3].

As a whole, the circular figure in question is an immense Zodiac, which the author sees as the prototype of the "Round Table"; and, in fact, the latter, around which twelve principal figures are seated, is indeed linked to a representation of the zodiacal cycle; but this does not mean that these figures are nothing other than the constellations, an interpretation that is too "naturalistic," for the truth is that the constellations themselves are merely symbols; and it should also be remembered that this "zodiacal" constitution is very generally found in spiritual centers corresponding to various traditional forms[4]. Therefore, it seems to us quite doubtful that All the stories concerning the "Knights of the Round Table" and the "quest for the Grail" may be nothing more than a dramatized description, so to speak, of the starry effigies of Glastonbury and the topography of the region; but that they should correspond to these is all the less improbable as it is, in essence, entirely consistent with the general laws of symbolism; and there would even be no reason to be surprised if this correspondence were precise enough to be verified even in minor details of the legend, which, moreover, we do not intend to examine here.

That said, it is important to note that the Glastonbury Zodiac presents some peculiarities which, from our point of view, could be regarded as marks of its "authenticity"; and, first of all, it seems that the sign of Libra is absent from it. Now, as we have explained elsewhere[5], the celestial Libra was not always zodiacal, but was initially polar, this name having been originally applied either to the Great Bear or to the

3 It would also seem, according to various indications, that the Templars had a certain part in this preservation, which would be consistent with their supposed connection with the Knights of the Round Table, and with the role of guardians of the Grail attributed to them. It is also worth noting that Templar establishments appear to have been frequently located near places where megalithic monuments or other prehistoric remains are found, and perhaps this should be seen as more than a simple coincidence.

4 See *The King of the World*, pp.58-59

5 Ibid., pp. 115-116.

constellation of the Great Bear and the Little Bear, constellations to whose symbolism, by a remarkable coincidence, the name of Arthur is directly linked. It would be reasonable to assume that this figure, at the center of which the Pole is marked by a serpent's head that clearly refers to the "Celestial Dragon"[6], must be attributed to a period prior to the transfer of Libra into the Zodiac; and, moreover, and this is particularly important to consider, the symbol of the polar Libra is related to the name Tula originally given to the Hyperborean center of the Primordial Tradition, a center of which the "stellar temple" in question was undoubtedly one of the images formed, in the succession of times, as seats of spiritual powers emanating from or derived more or less directly from this same Tradition[7].

On another occasion[8], we mentioned, in connection with the designation of the "Adamic" language as the "Syriac language," the primitive Syria whose name properly means "the solar land," and which Homer speaks of as an island located "beyond Ogygia," which only allows us to identify it with the Hyperborean Thuli or Tula; and "there are the revolutions of the Sun," an enigmatic expression which can naturally refer to the "circumpolar" nature of these revolutions, but which, at the same time, can also allude to a tracing of the zodiacal cycle on this land itself, which would explain why such a tracing was reproduced in a region intended to be an image of this center. We are now approaching the explanation for these confusions we mentioned at the beginning, since they could have arisen, in a somewhat normal way, from the assimilation of the image to the original center; and, in particular, it is very difficult to see anything other than a confusion of this kind in the identification of Glastonbury with the Isle of Avalon[9].

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6 Cf. the Sepher Ietsirah: The Dragon is in the middle of the sky like a king on his throne. The 'Wisdom of the Serpent', to which the author alludes in this regard, could, in a certain sense, be identified here with that of the seven polar Rishis. It is also curious to note that the dragon, among the Celts, is the symbol of the leader, and that Arthur is the son of Uther Pendragon.

7 This also allows us to understand certain relationships noted by the author between the symbolism of the Pole and that of the Terrestrial Paradise, particularly with regard to the presence of the tree and the serpent; in all this, it is always a question of the figure of the primordial center, and the three poles of the triangle are also related to symbolism.

8 . See our article in *La Science des Lettres*, February 1931 issue

9 It has also been suggested that this is the 'dregs of glass', which are mentioned in certain parts of the Grail legend; it is probable that, here again, it is a matter of confusion with some other more hidden center, or, if you will, more distant in space and time, although this designation probably does not apply to the primordial center itself.

Indeed, such an identification is incompatible with the fact that this island is always considered an inaccessible place; and, on the other hand, it also contradicts the much more plausible opinion that sees in the same region of Somerset the "kingdom of Logres," which is indeed said to have been located in Great Britain; and it is possible that this "kingdom of Logres," which would have been regarded as a sacred territory, which took its name from the Celtic Lug, which evokes both the idea of the "Word" and that of "Light." As for the name Avalon, it is clearly identical to that of Ablun or Belen, that is to say, the Celtic and Hyperborean Apollo[10], so that the Isle of Avalon is yet another designation for the "solar earth," which was, moreover, symbolically transported from the North to the West at a certain time, corresponding to one of the main changes that occurred in the traditional forms during our Manvantara[11].

These considerations lead us to other, perhaps even stranger, observations: an idea that seems inexplicable at first glance is that of attributing the origin of the Glastonbury Zodiac to the Phoenicians; It is true that many more or less hypothetical things are usually attributed to this people, but the very assertion of their existence in such a remote period seems even more questionable. However, what is noteworthy is that the Phoenicians inhabited "historical" Syria; could the name of the people have been subject to the same transfer as that of the country itself? What would at least suggest this is its connection with the symbolism of the Phoenix; indeed, according to Josephus, the capital of early Syria was Heliopolis, the "City of the Sun," whose name was later given to the Egyptian city of On; and it is to the first Heliopolis, and not to that of Egypt, that this cyclical symbolism of the Phoenix and its rebirths should actually be attributed. Now, according to Diodorus

10 We know that Mont-Saint-Michel was formerly called Tombelaine, that is to say, the Tumulus or the mount of Belen (and not the tomb of Helen, according to a completely modern and fanciful interpretation); the substitution of the name of the solar archangel for that of Belen obviously changes nothing as to the meaning; and, curiously, we also find Saint-Michaels Hill in the region corresponding to the ancient kingdom of Lugres.

11 This transposition, like that of the sapta-riksha of the Great Bear to the Pleiades, corresponds in particular to a change in the starting point of the year, first solstice and then equinox. The meaning of apple attached to the name of Avalon, undoubtedly secondarily, in the Celtic languages, is in no way in opposition to what we have just said, for it then refers to the golden apples of the Garden of the Hesperides, that is to say, the solar fruits of the World Tree.

Siculus, one of the sons of Helios or the Sun, named Actis, founded the city of Heliopolis; and it so happens that this name, Actis, exists as a place name near Glastonbury, and under conditions that directly link it to the Phoenix, into which, according to other interpretations, this "prince of Heliopolis" himself was supposedly transformed. Naturally, the author, misled by the multiple and successive uses of the same name, believes that this refers to the Heliopolis of Egypt, just as he believes he can speak literally of the "historical" Phoenicians, which is all the more excusable since the ancients, in the "classical" period, already quite often made such confusions; only knowledge of the true Hyperborean origin of these traditions, which he does not seem to suspect, can allow us to restore the real meaning of all these designations.

In the Glastonbury Zodiac, the sign of Aquarius is represented, rather unexpectedly, by a bird which the author rightly believes to be the Phoenix, and which carries an object that is none other than the "cup of immortality," that is, the Grail itself; and the comparison made in this regard with the Hindu Garuda is certainly very apt[12]. Furthermore, according to Arab tradition, the Rukh or Phoenix never lands anywhere other than Mount Qdf, which is the "polar mountain"; and it is from this same "polar mountain," designated by other names, that, in Hindu and Persian traditions, comes the sema, which is identified with Yamrita or "ambrosia," the drink or food of immortality[13].

There is also the figure of another bird which is more difficult to interpret exactly, and which perhaps represents the sign of Libra, but whose position is, in any case, is much closer to the Pole than to the Zodiac, since one of its wings even corresponds to the stars of the Great Bear, which, according to what we have said previously, could only confirm this supposition. As for the nature of this bird, two hypotheses are considered: that of a dove, which could indeed have some connection with the symbolism of the Grail, and that of a goose or, we might say rather, a swan brooding over the "World Egg", that

12 See our article on The Language of the Birds, November 1931 issue. The sign of Aquarius is usually represented by Ganymede, whose connection with ambrosia on the one hand, and with the eagle of Zeus, itself identical to Garuda, on the other, is well known.

13 See *The King of the World*, pp. 60-61

is to say, an equivalent of the Hindu Hamsa; In truth, the latter seems far preferable to us, the symbol of the swan being closely linked to the Hyperborean Apollo, and even more specifically in the respect we have considered here, since the Greeks made Kyknos the son of Apollo and Hyria, that is to say, of the Sun and the "solar earth," for Hyria is simply another form of Syria, so that it is indeed always the "sacred island" that is being referred to, and it would be quite surprising if the swan were not found in its representation[14].

There are many other points that certainly deserve attention, such as, for example, the connection between the name "Somerset" and that of the "land of the Cimmerians," and with various names of peoples whose similarity most likely indicates much less a racial kinship than a shared tradition; but that would take us too far, and we have said enough to show the extent of a field of research that is still almost entirely unexplored, and to give a glimpse of the consequences that could be drawn from it with regard to the links between the various traditions and their filiation from the primordial Tradition.

14 The merging of the two figures of Hamsa and Garuda is also quite natural, since they are sometimes even combined into a single bird which seems to be the original source of the heraldic two-headed eagle, although this one appears more as a double Garuda, the Hamsa-Garuda bird naturally having a swan's head and an eagle's head.